

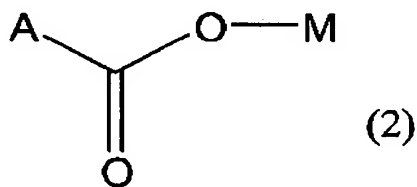
Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

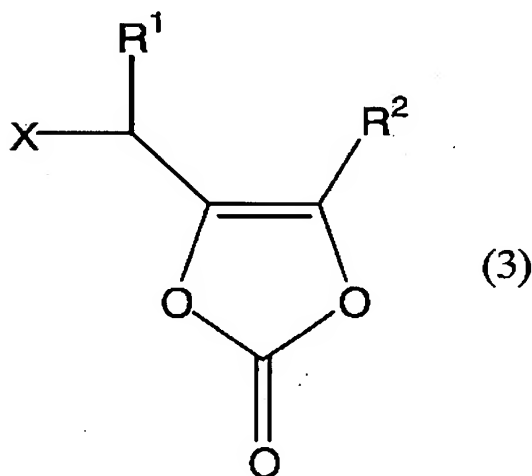
Listing of Claims:

Claim 1. (currently amended) A method for preparing ~~an organic~~ a β - lactam compound, which comprises ~~a dehydration step of distilling off water from a polar organic solvent solution containing the organic compound and water to bring the concentration of water below a given level,~~ the following steps:

reacting a compound of Formula (2),



wherein A represents a condensed heterocyclic group having a β -lactam ring structure, and M represents a hydrogen atom or a metal atom, in a polar organic solvent, with a 4-halogenomethyldioxolenone compound of Formula (3),



wherein R¹ and R² each independently represent a hydrogen atom, an optionally substituted C₁-C₆ alkyl group or an optionally substituted phenyl group, or R¹ and R² together form an optionally substituted C₃-C₈ ring, and X represents a halogen atom, to result in a reaction solution containing a β -lactam compound in the polar organic solvent;

wherein the dehydration step comprises distilling off water together with the dehydrating a polar organic solvent solution obtained as the reaction solution or obtained by working up the reaction solution, to bring the concentration of water below a given level, wherein the dehydration step comprises distilling off water together with the polar organic solvent while adding a polar organic solvent to the polar organic solvent solution, or comprises repeating several two or more cycles of adding a polar organic solvent to the polar organic solvent solution and then distilling off water together with the polar organic solvent.

Claim 2. (currently amended) The method for preparing ~~an organic~~ a β - lactam compound according to claim 1, wherein the polar organic solvent solution contains a halogen compound which produces an acidic substance upon coming into contact with water or an alcohol solvent.

Claim 3. (currently amended) The method for preparing ~~an organic~~ a β - lactam compound according to claim 2, wherein the halogen compound is an iodine compound.

Claim 4. (currently amended) The method for preparing ~~an organic~~ a β - lactam compound according to claim 3, wherein the iodine compound is iodine or a metal iodide.

Claim 5. (currently amended) The method for preparing ~~an organic~~ a β - lactam compound according to claim 1, wherein the polar organic solvent solution is a solution in an ether solvent or a ketone solvent.

Claim 6. (currently amended) The method for preparing ~~an organic~~ a β - lactam compound, which comprises the dehydration step according to claim 1, wherein the dehydration step is followed by a crystallization step of distilling off the polar organic solvent from the resulting solution while supplementing the solution with a poor solvent for the organic compound so as to crystallize the organic compound.

Claim 7. (currently amended) The method for preparing ~~an organic~~ a β - lactam compound according to claim 6, wherein an alcohol solvent is used as the poor solvent.

Claim 8. (cancelled)

Claim 9. (cancelled)

Claim 10. (cancelled)